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ABSTRACT

The "inevitable and ubiquitous nature of censorship" forces teachers of literature to accept seven responsibilities: (1) to know literature of all types and all periods extremely well and to know what constitutes literary merit and adolescent appeal in any work; (2) to understand the implications of arguments for and against censorship; (3) to build an English department capable of fighting censorship through both discussion of works likely to be attacked and implementation of a formal policy for handling any attempted censorship; (4) to prepare a rationale and defense for any work to be taught in any class by any teacher; (5) to communicate to the public and to students what is going on in English class and why it is going on; (6) to woo actively community supporters of academic freedom and to gain support before censorship strikes; and (7) to recognize that the censor may sometimes have a legitimate complaint and to recognize that not all English teachers are defensible, either for what they teach or for how they teach it. (Author/MF)

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SOME RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ENGLISH TEACHER FACING CENSORSHIP

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(Speech delivered at the Spring 1968 AETA Meeting in Flagstaff)

As I walked into the school on a lovely Spring morning a few years ago, I was greeted by my smiling and very nervous principal. He had been blessed with a telephone call, and I was to be equally blessed with a caller during my free hour. The visitor was the father of a sweet and naive girl in my American Literature class, he was a minister of one of the many splinter churches in our city, and he was clearly a good man--dedicated, religious, moral, sincere, and above all fearfully omniscient. With only a brief prelude, he launched into a solemn and almost tearful discussion of a sinful play his daughter had been required to read.

The play was THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING by Carson McCullers, a work I had chosen for a rather slow but surprisingly perceptive class. I would not have been shocked by an attack on some of the language used, indeed I had prepared a brilliant defense, but the attack came from a wholly unexpected direction. "This is a filthy play," he said. "It reeks with the lust of Satan. The sex is not even normal sex. Have you read this part?" he said, thrusting the text at me. The dialogue he had underlined is about half way through Act II, and concerns Frankie's desire to be an important part of her brother's wedding.

> Frankie: I was walking along and I passed two stores with a alley in between. The sun was frying hot. And just as I passed this alley, I caught a <u>glimpse</u> of something in the corner of my left eye. A dark double shape. And this glimpse brought to my mind--so sudden and clear--my brother and the bride that I just stood there and couldn't hardly bear to look and see what it was. It was like they were there in that alley, although I knew that they were in Winter Hill almost a hundred miles away. Then I turn slowly and look. And you know what was there? It was just two colored boys. That was all. But it gave me such a queer feeling.

I read the passage and handed the play back to him. With a startled look, he said, "Don't you see what's wrong?"

I had to admit that I could see nothing wrong. "Those lines are obviously homosexual." After I had added a clever, "Oh?" to the conversation, he continued, "Those two colored boys in that alley are obviously engaged in some obscene act."

After he had developed this interpretation for several minutes, I stuttered, "I never understood those lines in that way. How can you be sure you're right?"

Shocked as I had been by his earlier rhetoric, his response topped anything previous and proved wholly unchallengable. He looked at me kindly, forgave my innocence, and intoned, "I prayed to the Lord, and He <u>told</u> me." I had a numb feeling that we were wandering more and more into some sort of surrealistic dream world, but I had the presence of mind to ask, "Did your daughter understand what those lines meant?"

Benignly he smiled and tolerantly he answered, "Not until I <u>explained</u> them to her."

I remember very little after that, partly because his words became increasingly frenzied and evangelistic, mostly because I could hardly believe all this was going on. I do know that he was a friendly but quite irrational censor. His arguments seemed to me frightening and bewildering; my arguments seemed to him irrelevant and academic.

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Five truths about censorship and the censor can be drawn from this incident. (1) Censorship almost always arises from the study of contemporary literature. (2) Almost any modern literature is censorable by someone, somewhere, sometime, somehow. (3) Any English teacher worthy of the name is likely to encounter the censor, if he teaches modern literature worth the time and effort. (4) Censorship is unpredictable, books with obvious difficulties presenting no problem at all and books with no problems being attacked from way out in right field (never left field, of course). (5) Censors are often very nice people who want exactly what the English teacher wants, the good of the young. The approach to goodness is simply different. The censor wishes to protect students from evil; the English teacher knows that ignorance of evil is no shield against very real evil in the very real world. The English teacher is committed to the belief that the only protection against evil stems from awareness of the many faces of both Truth and Evil. In his classic argument against censorship, the AREOPAGITICA, Milton declared that virtue that is protected and never tried is but a blank virtue.

> I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd and unbreath'd that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocense into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary. The vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue, not a pure; her whitenesse is but an excramentall (superficial) whitenesse.

The censor deeply believes that the search for Truth is an easy one; indeed, the censor is often happy to report that he know The Truth. He is usually puzzled and grows uneasy when the English teacher argues that the search for Truth, or rather the many faces of Truth, is a lifelong quest and the purpose of education. On this point, the censor is much like Eric Hoffer's True Believer.

> To be in possession of an absolute truth is to have a net of familiarity spread over the whole of eternity. There are no surprises and no unknowns. All questions have already been answered, all decisions made, all eventualities foreseen. The true believer is without wonder and hesitation.
> (Eric Hoffer, THE TRUE BELIEVER, NY: New American Library, 1951, p. 77)

Before I take up the English teacher's responsibilities in facing censorship, I would like briefly to explore five objectives of teaching literature. These objectives will make clear why censorship is not merely likely but almost inevitable for the English teacher. First, we teach literature because it is enjoyable, meaning that it must be relevant to the lives of our students; second, because students can begin to understand themselves and others vicariously, meaning that the characters in literature must be believable (if not admirable) people; third, because students must begin to look at the ideas and values of other people and other societies for the purpose of contrast and challenge, meaning the literature must be honest; fourth, because students must increasingly face the reality of a non-perfect world, meaning literature must reflect our fallibility, our gullability, our stupidity, our cupidity; and fifth, because students can grow from transitory books to literature of greater depth and maturity and sophistication, meaning teachers and students must have the freedom to go wherever the search for knowledge and truth takes them.

We have too long sheltered students from reality, and in our noble efforts have made clear that there are two worlds--the real world and the world of the English class. Several years ago in a brilliant speech at the Denver NCTE Convention, Edmund Fuller spoke of the need to make the English classroom the "room the a view." Fuller spoke disdainfully of the dusty and sterile atmosphere of too many English classes reading

books remote from the world, and he contended eloquently that we must bring the reality of contemporary literature into English teaching. Whether we enjoy or wish to teach books like THE CATCHER IN THE RYE or BRAVE NEW WORLD or A SEPARATE PEACE or THE GRAPES OF WRATH or THE FIRE NEXT TIME or TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD is quite beside the point. These works speak to the adolescent today; we too can learn to speak to our students, or we can continue to ignore them. Do not misunderstand me. A diet without writers like Shakespeare or Dickens or Tennyson or Sophocles or Burns would be meager. These writers have always been able to speak to the young with the assistance of a good English teacher. But a diet without modern literature would be worse than inadequate; it would have no relevance to the students.

We must take seriously our obligations as teachers of literature, all this despite the Nice-Nelly English teachers who implore, "Why expose the sweet and innocent and clean students to the filth of modern literature? They'll soon discover how ugly the world is. Let us protect them as long as we can." The urge to protect is an honest and understandable drive of man; it is also futile. We must commit to memory and act upon the words of Wallace Stevens: "Literature is the better part of life. To this it seems inevitably necessary to add, provided life is the better part of literature."

I believe that the inevitable and ubiquitous nature of censorship forces us to accept seven responsibilities; (1) to know literature of all types and all periods extremely well and to know what constitutes literary merit and adolescent appeal in any work; (2) to understand the implications of arguments for and against censorship; (3) to build an English department capable of fighting censorship through both discussion of works likely to be attacked and implementation of a formal policy for handling any attempted censorship; (4) to prepare a rationale and defense for any work to be taught in any class by any teacher; (5) to communicate to the public and to our students what is going on in English class and why it is going on; (6) to woo actively community supporters of academic freedom and to gain their support before censorship strikes; and (7) to recognize that the censor may sometimes have a legitimate complaint and to recognize that not all English teachers are defensible, either for what they teach or for how they teach it.

(1) To know literature of all types and all periods extremely well and to know what constitutes literary merit and adolescent appeal in any work. Undergraduate students of mine rapidly tire of my frequent comment that a good English teacher knows virtually every work of literature, who wrote it, when and why it was written, and for whom it might be intended. Obviously, I exaggerate, but the fact remains--an English teacher who does not know his subject well is an unfit teacher. He must know an incredible amount of material--Greek drama, Elizabethan drama, the picaresque novel, the comedy of manners, the Theatre of the absurd, Metaphysical poetry, the formal essay, the Epic, literature written specifically for the adolescent (like Nat Hentoff's JAZZ COUNTRY or Mary Stolz' A LOVE, OR A SEASON or Jack Bennett's THE HAWK ALONE), children's literature (like Dr. Seuss' HORTON HATCHES AN EGG or E. B. White's CHARLOTTE'S WEB or Mary Norton's THE BORROWERS), and on and on. If the English teacher does not know his subject well, he will be unable to help his students find the books they so badly need to explore past worlds and their present world. The English teacher recognizes instinctively that he must be prepared to recommend books for several different situations --(a) for common reading and discussion by the whole class; (b) for small group reading and discussion; (c) for individual reading on some class assignment; and (d) for leisure reading unrelated to any classwork. Though these circumstances often call for different books, in each case the English teacher hopes to recommend the most appropriate possible book with the highest degree of literary merit and adolescent appeal. The extent of a teacher's knowledge clearly limits or enhances the number of recommendations he can make. Even more important to us, the knowledge he has encourages or diminishes the likelihood of censorship coming as a surprise. The teacher who knows few titles and recommends only those may encounter little immediate censorship, but his class is likely to be

devoid of life and any attempt to recommend other titles may easily lead to disaster. The teacher who knows many books and recommends them widely may often encounter censorship, but his class may see the real world in a classroom and that teacher's knowledge of books will prepare him for the onslaught of the censor.

Of course, no English teacher can pretend to read as much as he needs or wishes, but there are aids for the harried teacher. Reading the reviews in the SATURDAY REVIEW or THE ATLANTIC or THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW or THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS will help to keep up-to-date with many books. The ENGLISH JOURNAL and COLLEGE ENGLISH and ELEMENTARY ENGLISH contain both reviews and articles on provocative and pertinent material on adolescent literature or the classics or contemporary literature or professional books. Every teacher of English ought to own four inexpensive paperbacks--Richard Alm's BOOKS FOR YOU (the Senior High School Booklist of the NCTE), Charles Willard's YOUR READING (the Junior High School Booklist of the NCTE), Daniel Fader's HOOKED ON BOOKS: PROGRAM AND PROOF, and G. Robert Carlsen's BOOKS AND THE TEEN-AGE READER. All these contain many titles and valuable comments.

Similarly, the English teacher ought to know literary criticism generally and commentaries on the books most usable in high school specifically. THE ENGLISH JOURNAL often has articles exploring the literary merit (or lack thereof) and the adolescent appeal of many books a teacher might consider using. No teacher can hope to become an instant-expert for every book he might recommend, but he may begin to protect himself from the censor by knowing what critics have written.

Certainly, if the English teacher does not know literature well, he will be an obstacle to any department fighting the censor. We already have enough obstacles.

(2) <u>To understand the implications of arguments for and against censorship</u>. Although the teacher of English is usually eager to combat the censor, he often brings to the battle little more than ignorance of the rationales for censorship or against censorship. Such ignorance may give the teacher a high degree of objectivity, but it does him neither service nor justice. He needs to be able to argue clearly and persuasively, and this presupposes that he comes armed with a knowledge of the history and arguments of the censor and the teacher.

He must recognize that rational men have defended censorship on rational grounds, though rational is admittedly not the first word that occurs to teachers discussing censorship. Plato attacked the poets because they told lies about the gods and thus corrupted the young, basically a moralistic defense of censorship. Hobbes viewed man's natural passions as perpetually warring against the good of the state; literature reflected man's natural passions; ergo, literature was suspect, basically a political defense of censorship.

For the most part, modern censors adhere to either Plato's or Hobbes' approach, though modern censors are rarely so cogent or logical. The English teacher or the English department would be wise to maintain a file of materials on censorship, pro and con, for seldom does the teacher see an approach with any degree of originality. Indeed, the very repetitive nature of most arguments should help to arm the English teacher; once an argument is recorded in the departmental file, teachers should prepare an answer, preferably several answers. No, the censor may not be affected nor will the battle necessarily be won, but the English teacher comes armed. Note the words and tone of the following letter to the editor. Have you heard them before? Do you have an answer? Where can you find adequate answers?

> "When one considers the vast number of available books which contain writings by authors who did not use vulgar or filthy words, it is indeed

amazing how some people defend the books which contain such words. Sometimes it appears these people wish to promote vulgarity to the exclusion of writings that may have more lasting qualities."

. . .

"Teachers should not require students to read obscene or vulgar works and the school library is not the place for such trivia to be found."

. . .

"The purpose of education is to improve, not debase, the intellect. In what way does obscenity or vulgarity serve this purpose?"

If the teacher should know the arguments of the censor, he should certainly be as familiar with the arguments opposing the censor. Fred Millet argued that "censorship in the field of literature and the other arts is usually stupid, and always unintelligent" since the critical principles of the censor are "aesthetically indefensible;" that "censorship of literature is almost invariably self-defeating:" since it draws attention to the very work the censor wishes to kill; and that "censorship of literature is anti-democratic." (Fred Millet, "The Vigilantes," AAUP BULLETIN, Spring 1954, pp. 55-60). George Steiner added

> Censorship is stupid and repugnant for two empirical reasons: censors are men no better than ourselves, their judgments no less fallible or open to dishonesty. Secondly, the thing won't work: those who really want to get hold of a book will do so somehow.
> (George Steiner, LANGUAGE AND SILENCE, NY: Atheneum Press, 1967, pp. 75-76)

The teacher may offer other arguments. The community must have the writer, the artist, to reaffirm its truth and its destiny, or to show how far from the truth and destiny the community has strayed. The artist has the right and even the duty to warn us that we are drifting. We desperately need the moralists and the satirists and the iconoclasts to save us and our society from ourselves. Indeed, the English teacher may suggest that, whatever the time or place or style or tone of the writing, authors as dissimilar as Mark Twain or Sinclair Lewis or Henry Gregor Felsen or J. D. Salinger or James Thurber or Ray Bradbury or Shirley Jackson shared a common goal--to tell the truth about man as each author saw it and to measure the discrepancy between man's dreams and his realities. Each attacked some aspect of man's values, paradoxically, because he cared. If he had not cared, he would have sat smirking in the corner of life watching man plummet into Hell, and he would not have raised his pen to record it.

Obviously, the good English teacher will know the court decisions that affect literature, the 1933-34 ULYSSES decision in which Judge Augustus N. Hand wrote, "While any construction of the statute that will fit all cases is difficult, we believe that the proper test of whether a given book is obscene is its dominant effect;" the 1957 Roth decision which indicated that a work must be judged by its impact on the average adult, not youth, that a work must be judged as an entity, not by excerpts, and that a work is obscene only if the average person, applying contemporary community standards, finds the dominant theme appealing to his prurient interests; and the 1964 Jacobellis decision which announced that a work to be judged obscene must go substantially beyond customary limits of candor, must appeal to the prurient interest of the average adult, and must be utterly without redeeming social importance.

Knowledge of these decisions will not protect the teacher from attempted censorship, but it will help him to raise questions that require tentative answers, from both teacher and censor. The teacher who is not aware of the following questions and has given no time to searching for answers wanders into the jungle of the censor not just unarmed, but naked.

What constitutes a "dirty" book? A word or phrase or sentence or paragraph or page ripped out of context? How much "dirt" is required to make a book "dirty?"

What does appeal to man's prurient interest? A lingerie ad? Marriage manuals? Bullfights? Nude statues? Nudes in PLAYBOY? A wink? A kiss? An isolated word that offends some people? Restroom wall epigrams? Every instance of sexual intercourse? A book jacket? White girdles?

Does the avoidance of a knowledge of evil make a person good?

Who will censor? Is he qualified, morally and aesthetically? How can the censor claim that dirty literature corrupts all who read it except the censor?

Will not the act of censorship make the work more attractive and better known? Should not the censor consider keeping the book quiet rather than publicizing it?

Does literature that is sexually oriented harm youth? A survey by the New Jersey Association of Teachers of English of its state's psychiatrists and psychologists leads the reader to question whether there is any connection between juvenile delinquency and the reading of questionable books (see Sanford Clarke, "The Right to Read," THE NEW JERSEY ENGLISH LEAFLET, Winter 1966, pp. 1-8). A study by Dr. Marie Jahoda and the staff of the New York University Research for Human Relations entitled THE IMPACT OF LITERATURE: A PSYCHOLOGICAL DISCUSSION OF SOME ASSUMPTIONS IN THE CENSORSHIP DEBATE commented that

> "Persons who argue for increased censorship of printed matter often operate on the assumption that reading about sexual matters or about violence and brutality leads to anti-social actions, particularly to juvenile delinquency...There exists no research evidence either to prove or to disprove this assumption definitely...Juvenile delinquents as a group read less, and less easily than non-delinquents.

Finally, the English teacher should know the bibliography of censorship. Readers may consult various sections of this BULLETIN for titles.

(3) To build an English department capable of fighting censorship through both discussion of works likely to be attacked and implementation of a formal policy for handling any attempted censorship. Presumably, English teachers were hired as professionals who knew their subject and who had the perspective to handle the subject and its attendant problems and responsibilities. I have little faith in English teachers who are subservient to either parents or administrators. We are teachers of English; we are not servants of the public. That we should consider the requests and demands and pleas of both administrators and public seems obvious; that we should always acquiesce to their moods or whims seems to me pandering to the lowest common denominator of taste and intelligence. Giving in to the often capricious and arbitrary demands of administrators and public makes clear what the English teacher longs for--security, not truth.

Assuming that the English department can establish its professional character, it has the right to demand that the administration will let it function as a professional group. What should it do germane to censorship? It should establish a committee to keep a complete and up-to-date file on arguments for and against censorship. Another committee should assist teachers looking for more exciting and challenging books, not as a watchdog committee to warn teachers from a book, but an honest and sensitive group which will realistically appraise books and apprise teachers of the potential danger of a book. Ultimately, each teacher must decide for himself what he will teach, why he will teach it, and how he will teach it. But he deserves the help of his peers in finding titles, and his peers deserve the right to know who is teaching what, when, why, and how. Neither of these courtesies is common in our walled-off-tomb classes today. Both would help to avoid censorship or to fight censorship if it came.

One function of English department meetings should be the open discussion of these committee reports, any teacher being allowed to challenge any title or idea raised, and he in turn being open to challenge. That so many English department meetings are soporific disturbs me, there is so much that is exciting to talk about. Meetings that concern only the discussion of the new grammar text or who gets the set of SILAS MARNER after Miss Jones finishes them or who sells tickets at the Junior Class Play are worse than foolish; they are unprofessional and give English teachers a stigma they have trouble nullifying.

Surely it is the responsibility of every member of the English department to develop and implement a formal policy for handling attempted censorship. Such a policy should be universally and courteously applied, whether the objector is a minister, the wife of a school board member, a plumber, the Superintendent, or whoever. If the policy applies to nearly everyone, with exceptions, of course, then you have worse than no policy, and the public has a legitimate right to howl above favoritism. The NCTE pamphlet THE STUDENTS' RIGHT TO READ should be known by all English teachers, and the "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Book" on page 17 offers a model policy. To review it briefly, this form asks the critic to list his name and address, to indicate whether he represents only himself or a group, to note whether he read the entire book or only selected portions, to detail objections to the book, to reveal his knowledge of the writings of prominent critics of the book, to comment on what he believes to be the theme of the book, and to indicate how he feels the case should be disposed of (withdrawing the book from a student or a class or the library or whatever). Perhaps the most significant (and sneaky) question is the last one, which places a legitimate but difficult obstacle in the path of the censor.

9. In its place, what book of equal literary quality would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective of our civilization?

Nila Ahrens in her doctoral study of censorship across the country discovered that less than 20 per cent of the schools surveyed had any written or formal policy for handling censorship, a horrible commentary on the lack of industry or alertness or intelligence of English departments at large. Perhaps an explanation given to me at the Honolulu NCTE meeting of state representatives of affiliate committees on censorship may offer some small and illogical justification for the lack of such policies. A woman from a sparsely populated western state pontificated, "I don't see any point in having a policy until we need one. Then we'll make one up fast. Besides, a policy would make any community suspicious of the teachers. Anyway, we don't have any books that anyone could censor in our classes or in our library."

Create a policy and then follow it for everyone. Be courteous. Any phone call should be politely received with the statement, "Thank you for calling and for showing your interest in the schools. We have a form for people like you who care about the welfare of the students. Would you come by and fill it out?" No one, Superintendent or Principal or teacher or school nurse should be anything but respectful of the caller, nor should they do more than listen and then refer the caller to the policy form. That the caller will need to come to the school will discourage many, that he must complete a rather involved form which forces him to read and consider the book will discourage others, but these steps will not discourage all critics, and they should not discourage the critic with a sound case. After the forms are completed, they should be read and evaluated by the English department meeting as a committee of the whole in a quiet and careful manner. A meeting should be arranged with the principal, the objector, the teacher using the book, and the English department chairman. In any and every case, the English teachers should have the right to make the final decision on any book. The only proviso is that the parent can morally and legally ask that his child be exempted from reading that book.

(4) To prepare a rationale and defense for any work to be taught in any class by

any teacher. For whatever the class or for whatever the reason he chooses a book, the English teacher should be required to defend his choice on some level other than blind intuition. To defend any work, the teacher will need to approach the book anew, to discover what is in it, to determine what problems of theme or tone or style present themselves to the student or the possible censor, to debate what approaches to teaching the book will work for his class, and to justify whatever he plans to do. This justification should be both oral and written. In so doing, the English teacher will avoid quoting from authorities, other teachers, or the curriculum guide, instead using his own literary acumen and his own moral judgment. I am much in favor of such demonstrations of taste and sense and morality. They might help to weed out a few of the incompetents from our pedagogical field. And we seldom do any weeding.

(5) To communicate to the public and to our students what is going on in English class and why it is going on. For people presumably interested in and adept at the art of communication, English teachers are almost incredibly successful at hiding their ideas, materials, methods, and motivations under the proverbial bushel. While we might wisely hide some of our methods and materials from the prying eye of the public, why must English teachers assume that their business is nobody else's? Parents and students have the right to know what is going on and why it is going on in the English class. I realize some teachers will argue that some things will be distorted or misunderstood by parents, but parents do hear in altered fashion what the English teacher is doing, perhaps in the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, less often through emotion recollected in tranquility. What parents will hear is almost inevitably what is going on, almost never why it is going on. Having only half the story, parents may hear inexactly but that is hardly their fault.

Particularly with regard to censorship, this lack of communication is likely to breed misunderstanding, misunderstanding easily breeds fear, and fear almost invariably breeds contempt. We have enough problems in English teaching without adding to them needlessly. We must find some way of letting the public know what we are teaching, how we are teaching it, and why we are teaching it, if for no other reason that it is the public's right to know and our duty to inform. If there is any finer method of encouraging suspicion than maintaining silence and hoping that no one will discover what we are doing, I do not know it. Whether we inform citizens at PTA or Open House or during Education Week or what seems less important than that we take our responsibility seriously.

Similarly, we need to let our students in on the secrets of why we are teaching certain books. Usually they do know what we are teaching; often they haven't the foggiest notion of why we are teaching it. For many students English remains an "understood" subject, never one to be explained. If students are old enough to read certain books, they are old enough to know the rationale behind the use of this literature. They should not be kept in the dark, else they can only come up with halting explanations and rarely the one the teacher had in mind. That so many students turn off the English teacher and fail to respect him may stem from the students' feeling that he has never tried to turn them on and he does not respect them. In too many cases, the student attitude is based on an accurate appraisal of the teacher. The aim of teaching literature is to educate, to humanize, to free, not to indoctrinate, to mechanize, to enslave. Sometimes, the way we have taught literature simply provides us with a new generation of censors, those who see no reason why we teach the books as we do.

(6) To woo actively community supporters of academic freedom and to gain their support before censorship strikes. Friends of the English teachers abound in every community, but English teachers often fail to cultivate them except when censorship hits. Librarians, social studies teachers, and science teachers know the problems of censorship, and they should join the English teachers in the fight, if the English

teachers show an interest in helping others at needed times. The community has other people innately sympathetic to the English teachers, former teachers, city librarians, college professors, readers who want to protect literature, but so few departments of English woo them. That some people in the community care enough to defend English teachers and their precious and often private books is a blessing and a wonder, we do so little to deserve them. As Raymond Clapper said, "Never overestimate the information of the American people. But never underestimate their intelligence." (quoted on page 104 of Robert MacIver's ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN OUR TIME, NY: Columbia University Press, 1955) In Phoenix we are especially fortunate to have people like Charline Kvapil and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey and Louise Schellenberg who have worked with many supporters of the school to form the Right to Read Committee. Arising from the lamentable school board decision last year to drop a text containing two of e.e. cummings' poems, the Right to Read Committee is working to avoid similar situations by writing letters, by attending board meetings, by scrutinizing future board members, indeed by attempting to change the intellectual tenor and atmosphere of our community. That they face a long and arduous task is axiomatic; that English teachers in the Valley of the Sun have badly needed allies may be the finest gift any community could offer its schools.

(7) To recognize that the censor may sometimes have a legitimate complaint and to recognize that not all English teachers are defensible, either for what they teach or for how they teach it. Censors come in two varieties, the rational and the irrational. Unfortunately, the English teacher often blurs the distinction and views any censorship as inherently irrational. In so doing, the English teacher makes a major error, for the rational censor can be reasoned with and he deserves a hearing. Too often the English department believes, with a touching and childlike faith, that all English teachers are professional and competent. When one teacher commits some indiscretion or badly teaches or misassigns a work, the objector must be listened to. If it is one thing to protect teachers falsely or unfairly accused, it is quite another to protect a teacher who is wrong.

The teacher who blithely requires students to read Steinbeck's "The Snake", or Ginsberg's "Howl," or Albee's ZOO STORY before the students have considerable emotional maturity is asking for trouble, and he will get it, but so will his whole department. The teacher who teaches appropriate works like 1984 or BRAVE NEW WORLD or THE DEATH OF A SALESMAN or A BELL FOR ADANO to classes of emotionally mature students in an inappropriate manner, drooling salaciously over all the properly underlined passages, will also soon be in trouble. And so will his department.

The tendency for English teachers to protect their own is understandable, but I believe in some cases it is misguided. If the English teacher must err and time forbids any real inquiry into the truth of the case, then let the teacher err on the side of offering moral and legal assistance. But in so doing, let the compassionate teacher realize he may get egg all over his face. If the department has protected itself by establishing a censorship committee, if it knows the major arguments for and against censorship, if it requires a defense and rationale for any work used, if it develops and implements a formal written policy, if it is made up of truly professional English teachers, then the chances of censorship striking unexpectedly and damaging a teacher or a department are small. But before running instinctively to some beleagered colleague, the good teacher of English would be wise to investigate the details of the case. The defense of an indefensible teacher does him little good, and it may do the cause of literature and English teaching nearly irreparable harm. Additionally, the community may take the defense as one more bit of proof that English teachers are not to be trusted. If the goal of the English teacher is to search for wisdom and truth, then he is in an unenviable and untenable position in defending a teacher who has betrayed his students and his profession. The young or naive English teacher who assigns without thinking or planning ought to be chastized, but I am not talking of him or his case. One can forgive

ignorance; one has more difficulty forgiving stupidity.

I believe these seven responsibilities are applicable to all English teachers. The value of the study of literature lies in its search for truth and the assessment of truths proposed by many writers past and present. That in so searching much truth is found to be unpleasant reveals nothing of the degeneration of literature, but much about the nature and state of man. Students live with man, not the angels, and literature tells about man's relation with man. English teachers and their students have the right and the duty to follow the truth, wherever it may take them.

The lovely cliche that Truth prevails against all censorship demands considerable historical perspective. The witches at Salem may have rejoiced in their certain knowledge that history would absolve them, but they certainly can be forgiven some momentary anxiety about their imminent deaths. Galileo's truth was not killed by the Catholic church, but it did lead a precarious existence for years to come. As someone said, "Truth may not die, but sometimes it leads a wretched life." English teachers cannot wait for the happy days to come, the time when all men shall realize the fallacy of censorship. The students are here, now, and they deserve to read what they must here and now, not tomorrow.

The search for truth may be initially man's least rewarding quest, but it is ultimately his most necessary. As English teachers we must have the right to exercise our judgment about what we will teach. In the worse sense of that much misused phrase, education under censorship is "life-adjustment," since it allows no possibility of ideas or growth, just adjustment to the world as one group views it. Censorship represents a clear and present danger to the English teacher and the student. Perhaps even more important, censoring represents the death of education. Not to fight censorship is to be derelict in the duty to students, society, and freedom.